

Subj: New Message Testing on the Minimum Wage  
 Date: January 16, 2026

On January 12, we tested 31 unique messages (17 Democratic and 14 Republican) on whether to raise the minimum wage and conducted polling from December 18-22. These messages were tested via a web panel with 4,718 respondents to see how effective they were at moving voters to support a Democratic or Republican candidate for Governor.

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Some Democrats in Congress are proposing to...</b>	<b>Support/ Agree with Democrats</b>	<b>Oppose/ Agree with Republicans</b>
Phased Federal Minimum Wage \$12	Pass legislation to increase the federal minimum wage to \$12 an hour over five years. Under this policy, the federal government will increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$12 an hour on a steady basis over the next five years.	62%	38%
Phased Federal Minimum Wage \$15	Pass legislation to increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour over five years. Under this policy, the federal government will increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15 an hour on a steady basis over the next five years.	61%	39%
Immediate Federal Minimum Wage \$12	Pass legislation to immediately increase the federal minimum wage to \$12 an hour. Under this policy, the federal government will raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$12 an hour immediately upon passage.	57%	43%
Tiered Federal Minimum Wage Support	Pass legislation to set a federal minimum wage floor of \$12 with additional federal support for high-cost areas. Under this policy, the federal government will require all states to pay at least \$12 per hour and provide grants to states with high costs of living to increase their minimum wage higher.	55%	45%
Cost of Living Indexed Minimum Wage	Pass legislation to tie the federal minimum wage to statewide cost of living. Under this policy, the federal government will set different minimum wage levels for each state based on the cost of housing, food, and other necessities in that state.	53%	47%
Immediate Federal Minimum Wage \$15	Pass legislation to immediately increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Under this policy, the federal government will raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15 an hour immediately upon passage.	53%	47%
Phased Federal Minimum Wage \$20	Pass legislation to increase the federal minimum wage to \$20 an hour over five years. Under this policy, the federal government will increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$20 an hour on a steady basis over the next five years.	49%	51%
Phased Federal Minimum Wage \$25	Pass legislation to increase the federal minimum wage to \$25 an hour over five years. Under this policy, the federal government will increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$25 an hour on a steady basis over the next five years.	45%	55%
Immediate Federal Minimum Wage \$20	Pass legislation to immediately increase the federal minimum wage to \$20 an hour. Under this policy, the	43%	57%

	federal government will raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$20 an hour immediately upon passage.		
Immediate Federal Minimum Wage \$25	Pass legislation to immediately increase the federal minimum wage to \$25 an hour. Under this policy, the federal government will raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$25 an hour immediately upon passage.	39%	61%

For each of the above policies, we introduce it as a Democratic policy, explain that Democrats support it and Republicans oppose it, and ask voters to agree with Democrats or Republicans. We use this approach to better approximate the partisan dynamics of introducing these types of policies and avoid acquiescence bias.

Percentile ranking is relative to other messages tested on a variety of topics, like inflation, abortion, the economy, and more. The higher the percentile, the more effective that talking point is at moving a voter to support a Democrat. **We recommend utilizing above-average talking points, i.e. those above the 50th percentile.**

### **Democratic Messages Tested**

<b>Message Source</b>	<b>Message Content</b>	<b>Democratic Vote Choice Percentile</b>
<u>Sen. Peter Welch</u>	We're in the midst of a severe affordability crisis, with families in red and blue states alike struggling to afford necessities like housing and groceries. A stagnant federal minimum wage only adds fuel to the fire. Every hardworking American deserves a living wage that helps put a roof over their head and food on the table – \$7.25 an hour doesn't even come close.	97%
<u>Rep. Robert Scott</u>	No person working full-time in America should be living in poverty. The Raise the Wage Act will increase the pay and standard of living for nearly 22 million workers across this country. Raising the minimum wage is good for workers, good for business, and good for the economy. When we put money in the pockets of American workers, they will spend that money in their communities.	96%
"Less Buying Power"	The minimum wage has not kept up with the cost of living for decades. Workers today have less buying power than their parents did. A higher minimum wage will help millions of families afford rent, groceries, and child care without working multiple jobs just to make ends meet.	96%
<u>Sen. Bernie Sanders</u>	The \$7.25 an hour minimum wage is a starvation wage. It must be raised to a living wage – at least \$17 an hour. In the year 2026, a job should lift you out of poverty, not keep you in it. At a time of massive income and wealth inequality, we can no longer tolerate millions of workers trying to survive on just \$10 or \$12 an hour.	95%
<u>Sen. Bernie Sanders</u>	In the richest country in the world, nobody should be forced to work for starvation wages. It is time to raise the disgraceful \$7.25 an hour federal minimum wage to a living wage, at least \$17 an hour. Over 60% of workers in our country live paycheck to paycheck. Today, we are saying we want an economy that works for everybody, not just the billionaires.	95%

<u>Former Vice President Kamala Harris</u>	The minimum wage must be a living wage, and the current rate of \$7.25 makes it impossible to support a family. Two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women. That means we've got to change a system that forces a mom trying to keep a roof over her head and food on the table to work two jobs just to get by. The ladder of economic opportunity is broken.	95%
<u>Sen. Jack Reed</u>	The federal minimum wage has been stuck at \$7.25 for too long. No one in today's economy can make ends meet working for such meager pay. Those making minimum wage can't afford housing, food, and transportation so taxpayers end up subsidizing employers that pay so little. When businesses have to operate on a level playing field with fair pay it helps prevent costly turnover and re-training of workers.	95%
<u>AFL-CIO</u>	At this moment, raising the federal minimum wage protects workers and strengthens the American economy. A higher minimum wage lifts wages for millions of workers and drives economic demand in communities across the country. Congress must act to raise the wage and ensure that full-time work no longer leaves families struggling to pay rent or buy groceries.	95%
<u>Rep. Veronica Escobar</u>	No one should live in poverty, especially not in America, the world's richest nation. Democrats must continue their efforts to address economic inequality. Millions of Americans who work a minimum wage job shouldn't have to live paycheck to paycheck and struggle to survive. They deserve the dignity of a wage that helps them provide for themselves and their families.	94%
"Government Assistance"	Families cannot survive on \$7.25 an hour in today's economy. Working Americans should not need food stamps or government assistance when they have full-time jobs. Raising the minimum wage means taxpayers stop subsidizing corporations that refuse to pay fair wages while their executives make millions every year.	93%
<u>Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse</u>	As rising costs squeeze families across America, it's well past time to increase the federal minimum wage. Democrats must help more Americans get a foothold in the middle class by paying them a livable wage. Many low-wage workers face persistent economic insecurity, struggling to put food on the table and afford basic necessities, including housing, health care, and child care.	92%
<u>Gov. Dan McKee</u>	Hard work should be met with fair pay. By raising the minimum wage, we are sending a clear message that our commitment to hard working Americans has never been stronger. In Rhode Island, Democrats passed a bill that will raise the wage from \$15 to \$16 on January 1, 2026, and to \$17 on January 1, 2027, ensuring more families can make ends meet and support their children's futures.	90%
"Fairness Cuts Both Ways"	No one who works full time should live in poverty. But fairness cuts both ways. When executive pay explodes while workers fall behind, the system breaks. A reasonable maximum wage tied to worker pay restores balance, rewards hard work at every level, and ensures growth lifts communities, not just the people at the very top.	85%
<u>Rep. Nancy Pelosi</u>	With the introduction of the Raise the Wage Act, Democrats honor the bedrock promise that, in America, hard work deserves fair pay. Raising the federal minimum wage would make a meaningful	85%

	difference in the lives of millions of Americans – bringing us one step closer to ensuring every worker’s dignity and contributions are honored with a fair paycheck.	
“Fair Wages Strengthen Families”	Women make up two-thirds of minimum wage workers and deserve equal opportunity to support their families. When corporations pay poverty wages, working mothers are forced to choose between paying for child care or putting food on the table. Fair wages strengthen families and build stronger communities across America.	79%
<u>Rep. Emanuel Cleaver</u>	While CEOs have seen their pay continue to rise to astronomical levels, working-class Americans have continued to get the short end of the stick, failing to receive fair compensation for the work they do to ensure these massive corporations grow their record-breaking profits. It’s not right – and it’s about time Congress took action to provide these hardworking Americans a pay raise, which will stimulate local economies nationwide.	68%
<u>Sen. Bernie Sanders</u>	Over the last 50 years, nearly \$80 trillion in wealth has been redistributed from the bottom 90 percent of America to the top one percent. Today, the value of the current federal minimum wage – \$7.25 per hour – is the lowest it has been since 1956 and has declined by over 32 percent since it was last increased in 2009.	64%

**Republican Messages Tested**

<b>Message Source</b>	<b>Message Content</b>	<b>Republican Vote Choice Percentile</b>
<u>Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick</u>	In every corner of our country—from Levittown to Los Angeles—families are working hard, playing by the rules, and still struggling to keep up. It’s clear the federal minimum wage system is broken. Every American deserves the dignity of fair pay for a hard day’s work. And Republicans will keep fighting until they get it.	99%
<u>Sen. Josh Hawley</u>	For decades, working class Americans have seen their wages flatline. One of the major culprits of this is the failure of the federal minimum wage to keep up with the economic reality facing hardworking Americans every day. Bipartisan legislation would ensure that workers across America benefit from higher wages.	96%
“Craft Wage Floors”	Leaving minimum wage law up to states respects federalism. States should craft wage floors that reflect local labor markets and cost of living, rather than a federal minimum wage that ignores significant differences between rural, suburban, and urban economies. Regional wage floors allow communities to tailor economic policy to local realities.	96%
<u>Michigan Rep. Jamie Thompson</u>	It’s very hard to expect that a minimum wage job is going to support an entire American family. A lot of single moms out there are raising kids on their own. They would never be able to pay their bills and not be homeless if they were just working less than 40 hours a week at a minimum wage job.	93%
“Critique of Wage Stagnation	Raising the federal minimum wage is not the answer to wage stagnation. Instead we need investment in skills training, tax	91%

Solution”	reform that benefits middle-class workers, and deregulation that encourages hiring – strategies that grow real income without the negative side effects of mandated wage floors.	
“One Size Fits All”	Washington politicians pushing a \$17 minimum wage ignore that costs are different across America. What works in New York City destroys jobs in small towns. Local businesses and state governments understand their economies better than federal bureaucrats. One-size-fits-all wage mandates punish communities that cannot afford them and drive businesses to close or relocate.	89%
<u>Gov. Glenn Youngkin</u>	The free market for salaries and wages works. It operates dynamically, responding to the nuances. Instead of raising the minimum wage, Republicans should adopt this approach, reducing taxes, reducing regulations, reforming workforce programs, and investing in public education. Allowing the free market to operate is the only proven long-term path toward sustainable economic growth and prosperity.	88%
<u>State Rep. Jesse Topper</u>	Doubling the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would impose unsustainable costs on small business employers, force layoffs, and raise prices for consumers. We should pursue targeted tax reforms and workforce development instead of punitive wage mandates that ignore regional economic differences and small-business realities.	79%
“Small Business Employers Bear the Brunt”	Small business employers will bear the brunt of a federal minimum wage hike. With narrow profit margins, higher mandated wages force layoffs, reduced hiring, and increased prices for consumers, ultimately undermining the economic security wage hikes are intended to promote. Regional wage floors allow communities to tailor economic policy to local realities.	79%
“Disenfranchise Local Leaders”	Free markets, not government wage mandates, best determine fair compensation. Interfering with wage setting distorts labor supply and demand, leading to fewer job opportunities for low-skilled workers and disadvantaging small employers who cannot absorb increased costs. A federal minimum wage mandate would disenfranchise local leaders and could exacerbate unemployment in areas with weaker labor demand and lower living costs.	76%
“Hurting American Workers”	Doubling the minimum wage sounds good but will actually hurt the workers it claims to help. When labor costs jump too high, businesses cut hours, replace workers with automation, and stop hiring. Young people and those without college degrees will find it even harder to get their first job and gain valuable work experience.	68%
<u>Dana Loesch</u>	Raising the minimum wage is a horrible, progressive idea. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour will cost small business owners and lead to job losses across sectors. We should focus on tax relief and deregulation to grow wages naturally, not government mandates that hurt the very people they claim to help.	53%
<u>Rep. Eric Burlison</u>	The federal minimum wage shouldn’t exist. If we’re going to take a look at it, we should repeal it. The federal minimum wage exists only to distort the labor market and drive small businesses out of rural and suburban communities. We should trust local employers and communities to set wages based on local cost-of-living	32%

	realities, not Washington diktat.	
<u>Sen. Ron Johnson</u>	The real minimum wage is \$0 when you don't have a job. The minimum wage impacts just a small sliver of people – most people that want entry-level jobs. And so if you raise the minimum wage, you raise the cost of an entry-level job and you don't have them.	22%